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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 000721

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DEPT FOR EAP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/24/2018

TAGS: PREL PHUM PGOV RP

SUBJECT: EAP DAS HIGHLIGHTS U.S. SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY IN  
VISIT TO PHILIPPINES

REF: A. MANILA 654 (EAP DAS STRESSES NEED TO MAINTAIN

PRESSURE ON BURMA)

- 1B. MANILA 651 (AMBASSADOR FORGES KEY RELATIONSHIPS  
IN ISLAMIC CITY)
- 1C. MANILA 521 (ANTI-ARROYO PROTESTS STILL LACK  
CRITICAL MASS)
- 1D. 07 MANILA 863 (VISITING EAP/MTS OFFICE DIRECTOR  
URGES PHILIPPINES)

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Catherine Ebert-Gray, Reasons 1.4 (b)  
and (d)

1 (SBU) SUMMARY: During his March 1-5 visit to the Philippines, EAP Deputy Assistant Secretary Scot Marciel focused attention on USG initiatives that bolster democracy in the Philippines and the region. In meetings with high-level Philippine officials, Marciel underscored our support for allowing democratic processes to work in the Philippines, encouraging democratic reforms in Burma, and resolving reports of extrajudicial killings. DAS Marciel also visited U.S.-supported programs to improve the Philippine police and protect victims of human trafficking. He joined the Ambassador's March 1 visit to the Islamic City of Marawi, which highlighted our efforts to encourage a peace agreement (ref B). END SUMMARY.

ENCOURAGING PEACE AND UNDERWRITING DEVELOPMENT

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12. (U) DAS Marciel's engagement with USG initiatives that support and enhance democracy began with his joining the Ambassador for a tour of Marawi, a provincial capital in the heart of Muslim Mindanao (ref B). As the Ambassador voiced support for the Philippine government-MILF peace talks, DAS Marciel witnessed first-hand the public perception that a peace deal will bring greater prosperity and more USAID development projects, as evidenced by the enthusiastic welcome offered at each event.

PRESSING FOR DEMOCRACY IN BURMA

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13. (SBU) Marciel had visited the Philippines as EAP/MTS Office Director a year earlier, focusing on extrajudicial killings and democratization in Burma (ref D). Returning to the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), DAS Marciel again thanked the Philippine government for its proactive stance on pressing for reform in Burma, and he urged Asian and Pacific Affairs Assistant Secretary Romeo Manalo to continue working with ASEAN and the U.S. to advance democracy in the region (ref A). With coordination from Foreign Commercial Service, DAS Marciel also met March 4 with the board of the local U.S. Chamber of Commerce, delivering remarks on how the situation in Burma affects the investment climate in Southeast Asia.

He in turn heard the Chamber's views on regional trade and how to encourage the Philippines to become more attractive to investors.

#### SUPPORTING RULE OF LAW IN THE PHILIPPINES

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¶4. (SBU) DAS Marciel on March 4 also visited the headquarters of the Philippine National Police, where Gen. Jefferson Soriano, Chief of Task Force Usig, the unit charged with investigating extrajudicial killings of leftist activists and media practitioners, detailed the Philippine government's efforts to investigate and prosecute the killings. Soriano also explained efforts to reconcile nongovernmental organizations' estimates of the killings with the numbers based on investigations and legal proceedings. DAS Marciel congratulated Task Force Usig on the significant decline in reported killings in 2007. However, noting that the issue continued to attract attention in Washington, he stressed that more needs to be done, particularly with respect to prosecutions and convictions.

¶5. (U) DAS Marciel visited two partnership initiatives March 4 that enhance justice and receive U.S. support: a police training project and a transitional shelter for victims of human trafficking. The International Criminal Investigative Assistance Training Program (ICITAP) operates a police assistance project that teaches police leaders to become more effective trainers as a means of multiplying the impact of training; Marciel had previously visited an ICITAP-supported model police station in Marawi on March 1 (ref B). The March 4 visit to the Visayan Forum Foundation Halfway House for Trafficked Victims likewise showcased port police officials and a nongovernmental organization working together with USAID and G/TIP officials. The halfway house

MANILA 00000721 002 OF 002

provides a safe haven for victims--primarily women and children--of traffickers. DAS Marciel toured the port area facility and met with staff, who explained how their partnering efforts help address global patterns of trafficking.

#### CONCERNS ABOUT POLITICAL INSTABILITY ASSUAGED

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¶6. (C) Having arrived in the aftermath of the February 29 protests against President Arroyo's administration (ref C), Marciel found that many of his meetings turned toward discussions of domestic political friction, and conjecture regarding whether President Arroyo would be forced to step down. At a March 3 meeting of an informal "Likeminded Ambassadors" group hosted by the Ambassador, ambassadors from Canada, Japan, New Zealand, and Singapore agreed that street protests and widespread media reporting on corruption underscored opposition to the Arroyo administration, but were unlikely to lead to a crisis (ref B). The group agreed that democratic processes were sometimes messy, but that the Philippines' democratic institutions had matured to the point where the incumbent president could be expected to complete her term. The "Likeminded Ambassadors" also welcomed Marciel's explanation of the U.S. approach towards Burma, supporting a legitimate dialogue that brings the Burmese opposition into the political process (ref A).

¶7. (C) Ambassador hosted a private lunch March 3 with former Defense Secretary Avelino "Nonong" Cruz, a close confidant of President Arroyo and an influential attorney in Manila business circles. Though Cruz at first vacillated regarding Arroyo's fortunes, he settled on the view that the President could weather the political storm until 2010 by making policy changes and adjustments to her inner circle. Cruz opined that none of the potential presidential candidates would want to give Vice President Noli De Castro a leg up in the 2010 race by making him president now. Ambassador gently encouraged Cruz to share his ideas about

shoring up Arroyo's stability with the President herself.

¶8. (C) Later March 3, Executive Secretary (Presidential Chief of Staff) Eduardo Ermita offered his frank views of domestic stability. Ermita challenged the credibility of Rodolfo "Jun" Lozada, Jr., a key witness in the Senate corruption inquiry, and expressed confidence that the public protests would run out of steam. In light of protests, the Ambassador and DAS Marciel reminded Ermita of U.S. support for freedom of expression, human rights, and peaceful protest, as well as adherence to the constitutional process, and that Washington takes very seriously concerns over extrajudicial killings. DAS Marciel thanked the Arroyo administration again for its robust criticism of the Burmese regime, which President Arroyo publicly reiterated six days following the Deputy Assistant Secretary's visit (ref A).

¶9. (U) DAS Marciel cleared this cable.

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